

# A Journey Down Surplus Street

DUXBURY CLIPPER

## PART I: IN THE BEGINNING...

Most visitors to Duxbury -- as well as some residents -- think of Washington Street as the oldest street in town. While no one denies the historic significance and beauty of this roadway, it came into existence more than 160 years after the town's first roads were laid in 1637 under the direction of the Colony "whose roads are considered Duxbury's first," and Surplus Street was among them. A path more than just dirt or gravel. It can lead to untold tales and historical treasures. By taking a journey down Surplus Street one can walk through more than 360 years of Duxbury history.

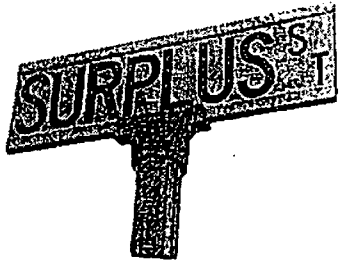
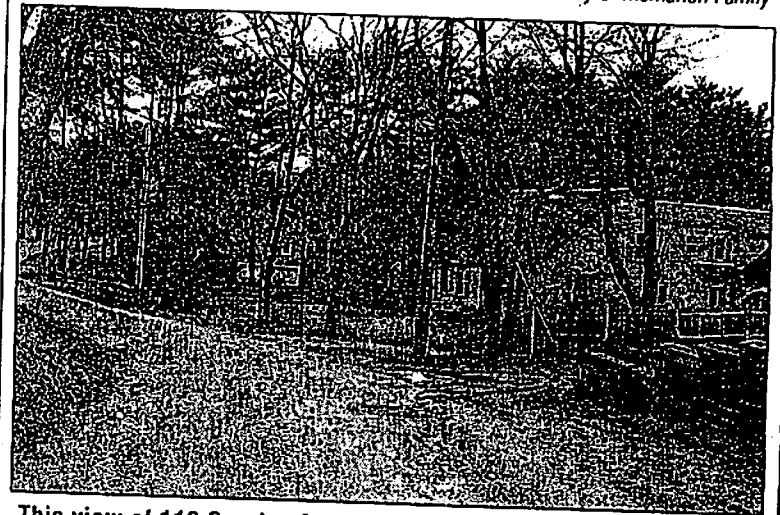


Photo courtesy of McMahon Family



This view of 112 Surplus Street has changed little since the turn of the century.

By DEBORA BABIN KATZ

The first roads of Duxbury were known as the Old Duxburrough Path of 1637. According to Colony Court records, the general court appointed twelve men on May 9th, 1637, to "lay forth the high ways of Plymouth, Duxbury, and Eel River."

In Duxbury, a jury was selected to establish the roadways for foot, horse and cart. The pathways included the road into the Nook; a "way"

now known as Surplus Street used to reach the marshes; and a road, long since abandoned that led from Henry Howland's property to the upper portion of Tremont Street. These pathways are seen in the Colony's Map of 1637.

Some historians argue that the history of Surplus Street as a significant pathway began even earlier than 1637 as it follows along an old Native American path used to reach the shorelines from

Pembroke. The first dwellers relied heavily on the well-established Native American pathways.

"It is very probable that most of these ways were paths of the red man which with the advent of the horse, were widened, straightened, and otherwise improved," according to Duxbury historian Henry Fish.

Duxbury's former town historian, Dorothy Wentworth, also believed life for the early settlers would have been very difficult if not for these "well worn trails." Clearing the land would have been tiresome and time consuming for the families who would have been "limited to water transportation."

Native Americans also used many waterways as a means of travel and for fishing and hunting. Such a waterway is still found on Surplus Street, although it is now no wider than a small brook, as seen in the photo below. It was once an important waterway used to travel from the Blue Fish River.

The Native American pathways not only provided a

means of transportation for the first settlers, but also made hunting easier. Not surprising, a Native American pathway was always found in the best geographical location. Their pathways avoided hills whenever possible, and never went through a swamp. They also always crossed over streams at a narrow and shallow point, said Wentworth.

The Duxburrough Path, crossed over Surplus Street between two antique cape homes at 98 and 104 Surplus Street, and led to the Green Harbor Path which was a well-defined Indian Trail the Native Americans used each summer to reach their shore camps.

First Settlers...

Henry Fish spent four

years researching colony and town records, old maps, and scouring the old paths by foot. His discoveries are well documented in "Notes" completed in 1923.

Fish walked all the old paths, "time without number," he said, traveling through the hills, valleys, streams and swamps of Duxbury. On many of Fish's excursions he would visit the old abandoned cellars where the early settlers had "cut a hole in the wilderness to build a home." Surplus Street contains some of the oldest cellars that Fish visited on occasion.

"There are three cellars on the land that was once the lands of Peter Brown...one of them is just back of the present houses on Surplus Street."

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# Journey Down Surplus Street: In the Beginning

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Fish wrote.

Peter Brown was a Mayflower passenger and one of the first settlers to Duxbury. His first wife passed away early on, and he later married "Ye Widow Forde." The couple had three children. Unfortunately, Brown only lived a few years after settling along this cart way. Historians believe he is buried in the Chestnut Street graveyard.

Brown's lands were divided between the heirs and sold to Henry Samson, a Pilgrim.

Samson was said to have come from a "very numerous and respectable family." He arrived on the Mayflower, but was too young to be a signer of the compact, according to historian Justin Winsor.

Admitted as a freeman in 1637, Samson moved to Duxbury early on, and by 1667 was allowed to seek

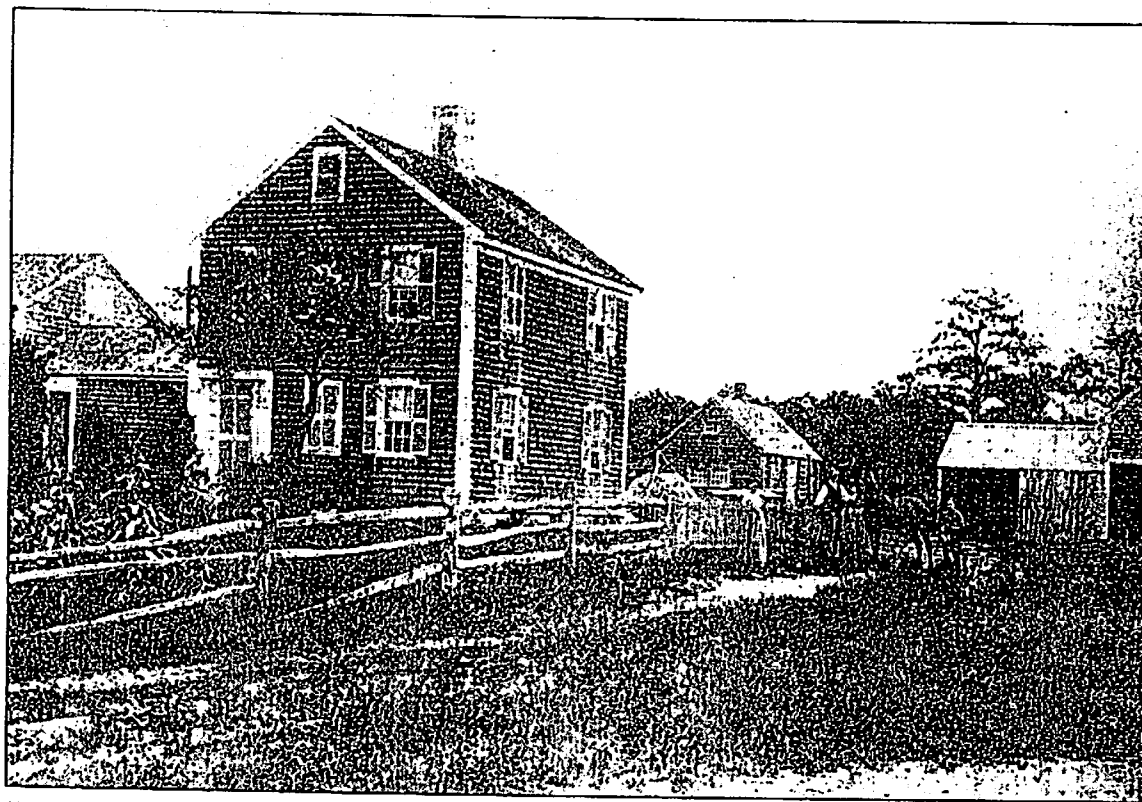
additional land for his large family.

He purchased some land from Eph'm Tinkham's widow, the daughter of Peter Brown, which was on the north side of the old cart way now called Surplus Street.

• He also received a court grant of three lots "from the over plus of lands on the south of Henry Howlands ...these lots were the lands now owned by the heirs of the late Joseph Soule and Clarence Taylor," noted Fish in 1923.

Henry Howland, a freeman, was one of Duxbury's earliest residents. He had substantial landholdings in Duxbury. His lands went southerly down to Surplus Street from the land which would later become the J.K. Parker Farm, and eventually the current Yacht Club Golf course.

"Two roads diverged in a



The Almshouse (c. 1818) on Depot Street near Surplus. The small building in rear was the Town Jail.

Photo courtesy of DR&HS.

yellow wood...

Roadways once established tend to remain a permanent fixture since to make a

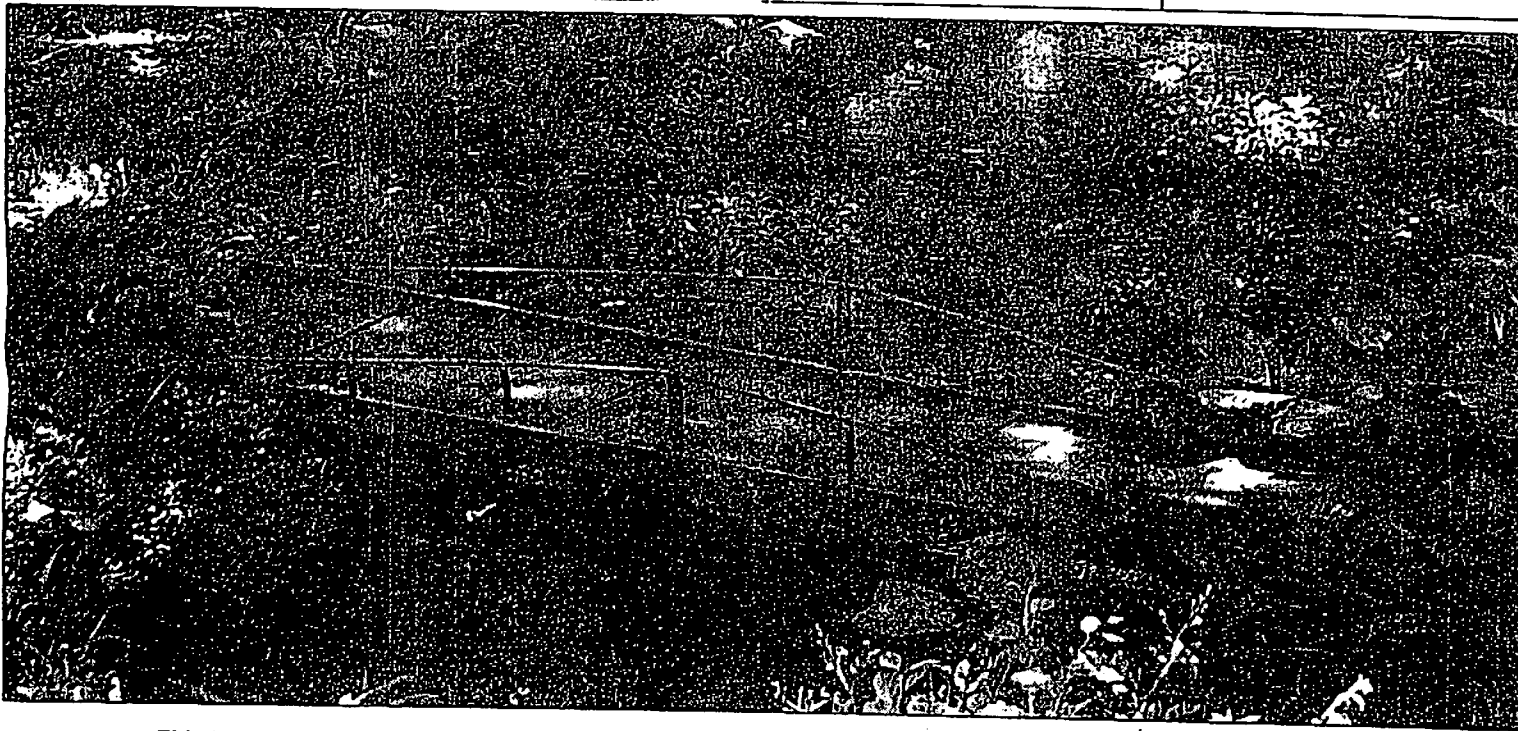
change would, as Fish noted, "bring hardship to those who first settled along the way."

There were, however,

some changes to Surplus Street over the years. For instance, the road once continued across Depot Street through the woods now known as Lapham Lot and owned and maintained by the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society (DR&HS). This old pathway can still be found on foot, eventually making a bend in the woods and reaching Tremont Street. It was known as the Hambleton Smith Grove. The tomb of Benjamin Smith is located on the southwest corner of this land.

This extension of Surplus Street is seen on maps as early as 1879 and was used to reach Duxbury's Third Meeting House. The Meeting House was used from 1785 to 1840 and was located "along Tremont Street at the northern

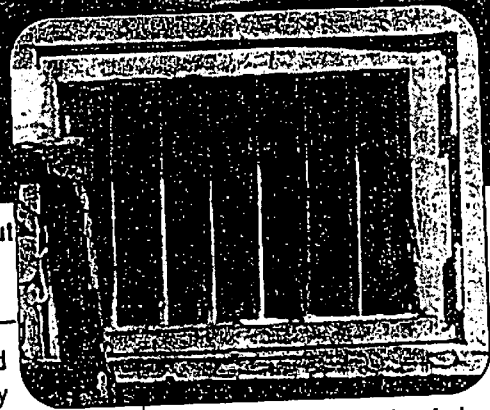
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This brook on Surplus Street was a waterway used by the Native Americans to travel from the Blue Fish River.



The old town jail (above) is now used by the DPW, but remnants of its former life still remain. (right)



edge of the Mayflower Cemetery because that location was closer to the then center of town," noted town historian Katherine Pillsbury.

We can only speculate why this section of Surplus Street never became permanent. Perhaps once the town's activities moved from Tremont Street to what is now Hall's Corner, little travel occurred here and it returned to its original use as pasture and woods.

There was also another section of Surplus Street, near Ebenezer Wormald's homestead (currently 232 Surplus Street), which led to another part of Tremont Street. Like the extension to the Third Meeting House, this old path is also located on the Map of 1879 as part of Surplus Street,

and now included in land owned by the DR&HS.

Wentworth once remarked at a DR&HS annual meeting how she "shuddered to think what would be now if the society had not had the foresight to preserve this land." Fortunately both paths still remain a part of the Surplus Street history thanks in part to this land preservation effort.

#### Forefathers and Foundations...

While roads usually remain permanent fixtures—becoming reliable means of use as they lead to homesteads, pastures, waterways, and meeting places—buildings do not always find the same fate. Duxbury boasts some of the most beautiful and abundant historical

homes in New England, but many of the earlier homesteads have not survived over the years. Little exists of the residences of Brown, Howland and Samson except for the depressions in the lands surrounding Surplus Street. Still these early settlers remain the forefathers of an area, which would become a thriving community along an old cart path and Native American trail.

*Next in this series, we will discover the history behind the Surplus Street homes which have survived over the centuries. We will also examine the industries, which played a role in the development of the town, as we jour-*